UNIVERSITY *of* NEW HAMPSHIRE
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

UNH Cooperative Extension's Community Profile Project

*"Another quality trait that I have grown to love is the people. On the
outside our people seem harsh and defensive but underneath all of that, they are kind, loving
people always willing to lend a helping hand."*

Nate Fournier, Hillside Junior High, Manchester, Grade 8

Introduction

Sound planning must be based on the best available factual information about a
municipality, its resources, and its people. An updated master plan is perhaps the most
complete source of information about current conditions and trends in the community.

Although the actual content of a master plan may vary from community to community,
essentially, it is a document which establishes an individual community's goals for its
future development and recommends actions to reach those goals (see Technical
Bulletin #3). Since people are the most essential ingredient to consider when preparing
or updating a master plan, it is imperative that the process provide ample opportunity
for the ideas, concerns, and aspirations of the people to be expressed and incorporated
in that plan.

A vital component in the master plan process is a community survey or opinion poll to
assure that the plan and its recommendations truly reflect the goals, interests, and
needs of the residents of the community. The Community Profile process provides an
excellent opportunity for a community to take stock of where it is today, and develop
an action plan for how they want to operate in the future. It is suggested that the
following Community Profile process be considered by the planning board when
developing or updating the master plan as a mechanism to strengthen citizen
participation, volunteerism, and involvement by various community organizations or
groups in the master planning process. Concerned citizens, across the state, meeting
both formally and informally are recognizing the need for their community to take
stock of their assets and evaluate critical areas for development, and, that this process
must supersede the "politics" of the community. The citizens have also come to the
realization that to tackle the process of assessment and evaluation on their own is a
difficult task.

History

The Civic Profile, the forerunner of the Community Profile, emerged from the Governor's Commission on New Hampshire in the 21st Century as an initiative to help preserve two themes that identify and unite New Hampshire people: Citizen Responsibility - a belief that individual citizens can and will take responsibility for the future; and, Living Landscape - a strong attachment to the environment of the state, including both its natural resources and the working landscape of business and industry, farms, and forests. The Civic Profile was designed as a process to enable communities to solve problems and deal with change by strengthening their "civic infrastructure" - the people, systems and institutions used to make decisions and come to consensus. The Civic Profile provided a forum for people to evaluate the state of ten components in their community, identified by the National Civic League as being qualities of a healthy community.

In the Civic Profile, residents from a diverse cross-section of the community met in a two-day forum to assess their community. Commission members participated, facilitated discussion, consolidated the results of the session into a report and supported the community in initial follow-up. The goal of the Civic Profile was to measure a community's capacity to deal with change and solve its problems. The end result was a work plan designed to reinforce areas identified in the two-day forum as weaknesses, and to enhance efforts deemed as working well. The Commission performed the first Civic Profiles during 1989 and 1990 in nine communities and one county in New Hampshire (see list on last page)

As a result of the Commission's recommendations, the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension assumed responsibility for continuing the Civic Profile Project. Between 1991 and 1996, UNH Cooperative Extension conducted Civic Profiles in the 14 communities.

In 1995, the League of Women Voters in the Upper Valley, working with UNH Cooperative Extension and University of Vermont Cooperative Extension, modified the Civic Profile and retitled it to Community Profile. The ten components were revised to incorporate components from the Vital Communities of the Upper Valley Profile to encourage broader community applications. The components were:

Civic Infrastructure

1. Effective Community Leadership: A Broader Definition
2. Informed Citizen Participation: More Than Voter Turn-out
3. Inter-Group Relations: Celebrating Diversity Within the community

<u>Community Infrastructure</u>

4.   Cultural Heritage: Arts, Festivals, and Celebrations
5.   Education and Social Services: Meeting Our Citizen's Needs
6.   Community Infrastructure: The Basics That Serve Our Needs

<u>Environment</u>

7.   Natural Resource Base: Water, Energy and Materials
8.   Our Working Landscape: Village, Farm, Forest

<u>Economy</u>

9.   Economic Vitality: Stability through Diversity
10. Local Business, Local Wealth: Recirculating Money Within the Community

The Community Profile Project Today

In the fall of 1999, members of the UNH Cooperative Extension Community Profile Implementation Team again revised the ten component areas, to more closely align them to the issues facing New Hampshire's communities today. In addition, an eleventh component was developed. They are:

Effective Community Leadership
Informed Citizen Participation
Sense of Community
Fostering Healthy Families, Individuals, and Youth
Lifelong Education and Learning
Community Services, Facilities, and Utilities
Recreation and Cultural Heritage
Working Landscape and the Natural Environment
Economic Vitality
Growth and Development
Transportation

In New Hampshire, as of December 2001, twenty-six Community Profiles have been conducted by UNH Cooperative Extension, and eleven by the Vital Communities of the Upper Valley (see last page).

Process

The Community Profile takes about six months to plan and organize, and a weekend (usually a Friday evening and all day Saturday) to implement. There are two distinct parts of the Profile, planning/preparation and the event itself. The planning is critical to the success of the Profile. If the entire community is not represented within the event

or not given the opportunity to participate then the result will be open to challenge. The participants must represent a broad cross section of the community so the process is not perceived as an attempt by a specific group to impose its wishes and values upon the community. This must be avoided to ensure success of the process.

The Community Profile is a process by which communities take stock of where they are today and develop an action plan for how they want to operate in the future. Like the Civic Profile, it is a self-evaluation tool that draws heavily on the collective wisdom of the participants, and helps communities develop problem-solving abilities; it is not a test or a comparison between communities. The process provides a method for citizens to affirm community strengths, find collaborative approaches to meet challenges creatively, and manage change. Whether the issue is a quality school system, an air pollution problem, lack of adequate affordable housing or solid waste disposal, the need for effective problem-solving skills is the same. One of the major outcomes of the Community Profile is more citizen participation in the community and the affairs of its government.

Once a group has recognized the need for this kind of process in a community, representatives of UNH Cooperative Extension meet with them to outline the Community Profile. If they decide to proceed, they are asked to form a Steering Committee who will do the following:

C   Make public announcements (press releases, cable television announcements, flyers, posters, etc) to inform citizens who wish to participate.

C   Make arrangements for a date, site and refreshments. Often local schools can be used at little or no cost. Local volunteer or church groups or businesses may be willing to provide food. Organize Friday night pot luck dinner.

C   Research and contact funding sources if needed.

C   Identify and invite a broad cross section of residents to participate. Everyone should be represented.

C   Identify facilitators and arrange for facilitator training.

C   Evaluate process, develop structure and plan for follow-up support of identified projects.

The Profile Event - Friday Evening

The Profile event starts off with a pot luck supper on the evening of the first day. After presentations by the Steering Committee, the lead facilitator takes the community participants through a variety of exercises. As a large group, they are asked to share their positive or negative feelings about what their community is like now and what they would like the community to be like in the future. All responses are recorded for inclusion in the final report.

The facilitator then introduces eleven components of a successful community, which are as follows:

1. **Effective Community Leadership**
    Healthy communities have, and develop, public leaders who work together to enhance the long-term future of the community. Community leadership must be responsive, honest, efficient, enlightened, fair and accountable. It should have the ability to bring the community together to participate in open, neutral dialogue on important issues. Leaders should be representative of their community and be able to envision an economically secure, environmentally sound and socially viable future. Leaders should understand the challenges facing the community and be able to take advantage of opportunities within the community and in cooperation with neighboring ones. Leadership should empower community members to assist in resolving community issues.

2. **Informed Citizen Participation**
    In a healthy community, citizens actively participate through voting in local elections, serving on local boards, attending public hearings, and being involved in civic organizations and community activities. The increasing complexity of municipal operations is limiting the ability of government to meet community needs, escalating the importance of active citizen involvement and volunteerism. All sectors within a community -- private, public, and nonprofit -- must each take responsibility for the community's civic education and exchange information with the public. All citizens need to develop knowledge and skills to contribute to community life. Shared problem solving and planning for the future as a community increases local pride and commitment.

3. **Sense of Community**
    A sense of community is an intangible yet vital component of a healthy community. It encompasses elements such as image, spirit, character and pride, along with processes such as communication, inter-group relations, and networking. A community is made up of different people with different interests, experiences and backgrounds. These characteristics may divide a community into natural groups but there must be cooperation among them if the

community is to work well as a unit. Increased communication and understanding of different perspectives among groups and within the community as a whole is an important factor in establishing a sense of community. Villages, towns, and cities with a sense of community include those wherein all members: contribute to and hold a common vision for the future; respect and celebrate their heritage, diversity, and resources; share information, and; develop and sustain an abundance of social networks and relationships.

4. **Fostering Healthy Families, Individuals, and Youth**
Most communities face a variety of challenging social issues, such as substance abuse, domestic abuse, poverty, and other concerns related to the elderly, youth, and families. Addressing these concerns effectively takes the coordinated efforts of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Support services such as adequate child day care, comprehensive after-school, youth, teen, and senior programs, preventative health and substance abuse programs, parenting and family support programs, and effective human service networks help strengthen the social fabric of a community. Aided by effective communication, compassionate leadership, active citizen participation, and inter-group cooperation, a comprehensive package of supportive services will enable a community to nurture healthy community members.

5. **Lifelong Education and Learning**
Education is a lifelong endeavor, much more extensive than just the K-12 school system. It starts at home, continues through childhood and the teen years, and progresses throughout adult life. People of all ages need to develop knowledge and skills in order to improve the quality of their own lives and those of their families, and to contribute more effectively to community life. Programs of higher education and lifelong learning provide local businesses with a pool of trained employees. Other formal and informal learning opportunities allow community members to discover hidden talents and develop an array of interests and skills. Lifelong learning allows citizens to manage their lives more effectively in a changing economy and to participate in increasingly complex municipal operations with greater knowledge and skill.

6. **Community Services, Facilities, and Utilities**
A community provides many essential facilities and services to its members - public facilities such as municipal buildings, schools, sidewalks, roads, libraries, a recycling center, and cemeteries, and services and utilities such as police, fire, ambulance, highway maintenance, water, and sewer. These key functions consume the majority of tax dollars and sharply influence the community's quality of life.

7. **Recreation and Cultural Heritage**
Recreational and cultural activities nurture the body and soul of a community - individual and team sports, outdoor activities, art, crafts, music, dance, theater, holidays, festivals, and celebrations. Recreational opportunities allow community members to experience and appreciate the community's diversity of natural and human resources. Cultural activities reflect and build a community's positive sense of itself and strengthen the fabric of social interactions within the community.

8. **Working Landscape and the Natural Environment**
Natural resources and historical assets of a community contribute significantly to the quality of life for residents and play an integral part in defining community character. Streams, rivers, walking trails, working farms, forests, clean air, historic buildings and bridges, wildlife, and open land help determine a community's personality and contribute to the everyday pleasures of community life. A sustainable community recognizes the importance of these assets and takes appropriate measures to assure their continuance.

9. **Economic Vitality**
The private, public and non-profit sectors are all important in attracting new investment and in developing new businesses that suit the character of the community and meet its needs. The need to sustain successful workplaces is an important factor to the health of a community. The more often money circulates within the community before leaving, the more the community benefits. A healthy community includes access to a variety of environmentally sound businesses, industries, and institutions that provide reasonable wages and benefits to workers, engage in family-friendly policies, provide workers with opportunities to develop marketable skills, and contribute to the overall well-being of the community.

10. **Growth and Development**
A community can more effectively manage its growth through the prudent use of local zoning ordinances and planning regulations that guide how land is divided, used, and developed,. These tools allow the community to regulate the development of residential areas, commercial districts, and the town center. These are key considerations in managing growth while maintaining community character. Another important factor in the development of a healthy community is the diversity of the housing. This encompasses availability, affordability, and location, all of which affect the lives of community members, especially the elderly, disabled, and low-income families.

11.   Transportation

A community's strategic location and economic importance bring many people to live, work, and shop here. Roads get most of us where we need and want to go, and most people drive their own cars for convenience. However, more vehicles sharing the roads results in increased highway maintenance, air pollution, and traffic congestion. Alternatives to automobile travel include pedestrian and bicycle travel, and bus and rail transportation.

The facilitator then randomly assigns participants into eleven small groups, with each group corresponding to one of the above components. Each group is led by a community person who has received training in facilitation skills. Once in these groups, participants discuss their community as it relates to their assigned component. Groups adjourn for the evening once their task is completed.

The Profile Event - Saturday

On the morning of the second day, the lead facilitator welcomes participants back as a large group and reports back on the results of the Friday night small group discussions. Participants are asked what key issues they heard, which are then grouped by the lead facilitator into six to ten broad themes. This is done by consensus of the entire group. Once completed, people break out into small working groups for the theme of their choice. The small groups define the problems or opportunities as they pertain to the issue and what they hope to accomplish in the form of project goals. Potential problems or solutions are proposed and these are rated on an impact-feasibility basis. Three projects are selected based on their location on the impact-feasibility grid, to bring to the entire group.

At the end of the morning, the large group reconvenes to hear the reports from the morning's small groups. The lead facilitator asks: "Which project do you think we should move forward on? Which is the most important project for our town right now?" The large group votes on projects and the ones with the most votes are worked on in the afternoon small groups. Participants choose the project they want to work on in the afternoon, addressing critical steps to implementation.

The final plenary session includes a discussion on "Where do we go from here?" What kind of communication system will exist and can the group decide on future meetings. A member of the Steering Committee closes the event to give the community ownership of what has occurred. The report which is produced by UNH Cooperative Extension includes all the information recorded throughout the one and half day event. The Steering Committee has the responsibility for printing and distributing the report in a timely manner. Enough copies should be produced so that everyone who attended receives a copy and there are extras for the general public, public library, etc.

For more information on the UNH Cooperative Extension's Community Profile Project, contact:

Michele Gagne, Program Coordinator
Strengthening NH Communities Initiative
309 James Hall
56 College Road
Durham, NH 03824
website: http://ceinfo.unh.edu

Phone: 603-862-5046
Fax: 603-862-0208
Email: michele.gagne@unh.edu

New Hampshire Communities Who Have Participated in a Civic/Community Profile

Civic Profiles, 1989-90

C Conway
C Epsom
C Exeter
C Lancaster

C Lebanon
C Manchester
C Meredith

C Rochester
C Sullivan County
C Winchester

Civic Profiles, 1991-96

C Alton
C Belmont
C Concord
C Deerfield
C Derry

C Gilmanton
C Hollis
C Laconia
C Milton
C New Durham

C Northwood
C Peterborough
C Rollinsford
C Wolfeboro

Community Profiles, 1996-2001

C Amherst
C Antrim
C Bethlehem
C Brentwood
C Brookline
C Canaan
C Candia
C Charlestown
C Colebrook
C Enfield
C Grantham
C Hanover
C Haverhill

C Henniker
C Hooksett
C Hillsborough
C Hudson
C Kingston
C Lebanon
C Lisbon
C Litchfield
C Loudon
C Lyndeborough
C Manchester
C Mont Vernon
C New Hampton

C Newport
C Nottingham
C Pittsfield
C Plainfield
C Rindge
C Salem
C Sanbornton
C Sandwich
C Swanzey
C Unity